

Montpelier Planning Commission
January 25, 2010
City Council Chambers, City Hall

Subject to Review and Approval

Present: Jesse Moorman, Chair; David Borgendale, Vice Chair; Missa Aloisi, John Bloch, Alan Goldman, and Bethany Pombar; also Lucia Bragg, Youth Member.
Staff: Clancy DeSmet, Planning and Zoning Administrator.

Call to Order:

Jesse Moorman, Chair, called the meeting of the Planning Commission to order at 7:00 P.M.

Review of Minutes:

Since there weren't enough members present from the last meeting they waited until the next meeting to approve the minutes.

Breakout Session – Infrastructure & Built Environment:

The Planning Commission broke out into three small groups and discussed the remaining chapters of Infrastructure and Built Environment. Clancy DeSmet sat in on the Transportation Goal. Group 1 was Communications and Energy; Group 2 was Food; and Group 3 was Transportation.

enVision Plan Drafting – Master Plan:

Goal A: Target 1: Communications:

They changed Strategy 1a so it will read: "Implement a municipally owned fiber-optic system to extend affordable telecommunications to all residents, businesses and institutions within the community." Strategy 1c.2 was changed to read: "Improve public access to communications technology to those unable to afford it."

Strategy 1e they made the revision of turning shops to businesses so it reads: "Develop an advisory function to help local businesses redefine their business and nonprofit models and adapt to internet technology."

Target 2:

They changed the bullets to have by 2020 greater than 25 percent. They switched to those to 30 percent.

Strategy 2a.1 they took the last sentence of 2a.1 and put it up into the strategy itself. Then, they added a third strategy under this 2a.3. "Encourage interactive methods for engaging and informing citizens on issues."

That was the extent of the revisions to Goal A.

Mr. Borgendale said on 2a.2 that perhaps they might talk about making stuff recorded for them for the internet in some fashion.

Council Member Sherman said that was installed today. You can download all of this on the internet. It is on the city's web site.

Goal B: Energy

Energy efficiency in Montpelier is maximized. Montpelier's energy is generated by renewable resources of local origin. The delivery of energy is structured to encourage efficient use and affordability.

Strategy 1a. had a minor revision. The last sentence reads – “Residents are encouraged to replace gas-powered mowers with electric or human powered mowers.”

Under Target 3 knowing how much they like the term green they decided to spell out under Strategy 3b what they meant by “greenest.” “When the City purchases new vehicles for its fleet, it considers the highest energy efficient design options.” The idea is to capture something that is like in a target, which is highest energy efficient design available out of all economically competitive products as measures on a life cycle basis.

Target 4 – 2009 has come and gone. It will now read: “By 2015, 1,000 Montpelier homes will be weatherized and switched to a carbon neutral fuel source.

Ms. Aloisi asked if they could define carbon neutral fuel source. We could put in a footnote.

Strategy 4d. is the next change. It will now read: “Develop a set of household energy-saving tips to help residents and businesses reduce energy. In Strategy 4e. they changed build to generate.

Council Member Sherman said she thinks they need to look really closely at Target 2 and Strategy 2b. She wants to talk about the bio mass district energy facility that just received the \$8 million grant. Shouldn’t that be mentioned here? She thinks that Strategy 2b should read that the City of Montpelier establishes a bio mass district energy facility (CHP Combined Heat and Power Plant) to serve. It serves not only the city but it serves the Capitol Complex, downtown residents and municipal buildings. She is also suggesting the promotion of strategy 2b into another target because we are going to do that, and it will have lots of sub activities around it.

Mr. Moorman said it is fine with him to make it a new target. Target 2 reads that by 2020 Montpelier reduces import of wood pellets by 30% because more wood pellets are provided locally. They have struggled with the concept of what is local and what does import mean. They had thought about saying Vermont and the example is you have a plant in Bradford, Vermont and right across the river within 5 miles there is Woodsville, New Hampshire. If it was Vermont you could have someone from St. Albans or Manchester able to meet their needs but somebody across the river couldn’t.

Ms. Pombar said we aren’t really concerned about their needs. We are concerned about our use so we are mostly concerned about where we are importing from. There isn’t a processing plant in Bradford.

Mr. Moorman said we need to give another thought to what we mean by local, and it might not be the same as with food because we’re dealing with forest products. Garth made the point that sustainable forest products you need a radius of 100 miles in some instances to be sustainable.

Ms. Aloisi said you use a 500 mile radius for building materials.

Mr. Borgendale said it strikes him in these definitions we really need to be talking about radius and not political relations. It is really more an issue of how far we have to haul the stuff to get it here.

Mr. Bloch said hauling it by rail or truck makes a huge difference.

Ms. Pombar said in Goal B, Strategy 1a, footnote 3, this seems a little difference. It seems a little more research based comment. Do we really need it? It is different than all of the other footnotes.

Mr. Borgendale said focused strictly on lawn mowers seems to be a little limiting because there are two other small gasoline powered devices that are probably used as much as lawnmowers are, which are snow blowers and chainsaws. That kind of implement ought to be covered here and not just lawnmowers.

Ms. Aloisi how about saying residents are encouraged to replace gas powered lawn equipment or landscaping equipment with electric or human powered equipment. We could change mowers to equipment.

Ms. Pombar asked if they should remove the footnote. Mr. Moorman and other members of the Planning Commission agreed they didn't need it.

Ms. Aloisi said under Target 4, Strategy 4a, asked if perhaps weatherization could be part of a separate strategy because the first part is encouraging residents and businesses to investigate and take advantage of programs offered by Efficiency Vermont and other energy service providers to increase energy efficiency. Perhaps a separate strategy would be to connect weatherization and energy efficiency programs with groups like Montpelier Senior Center, etc.

Mr. Moorman replied he had no problem with that.

Ms. Aloisi said strategy 4b she wants to add reduce energy consumption. Mr. Moorman and members of the Planning Commission said that makes sense. She has a new target. She knows we have the bio mass coming on line. They should retrofit municipal buildings to provide at least 35 of the buildings' electricity from a renewable resource as defined by the Center for Resource Solutions. It is a green certification program. That could be a new target in addition to the bio mass that is coming on line.

Mr. Moorman said it seems very appropriate under this section. He recalls a lot of language under the housing section about energy efficient municipal buildings and design and zoning bylaws geared towards that. He doesn't see any reason they can't add it here as well.

Ms. Aloisi said she is also talking about our current infrastructure and citywide as a goal we say that a certain percentage of the electricity comes from a renewable source. It is different now that there is bio mass. Mr. Goldman said they could apply that to the capitol complex. If you add that on top of the bio mass you could expand the network for the bio.

Mr. Moorman suggested they move on to Goal C – Food.

Ms. Pombar read Goal C – Food:

Food sources derive from local, sustainable practices that provide us with a high quality, healthy, affordable, and secure supply of food. Neighborhood gardens grow local, seasonal, and fresh food for all our residents, and neighborhood food storage facilities ensure local food in all seasons.

They were going to amend the goal language to read "Neighborhood gardens and local farms grow local saleable food. Under Target 1 they changed Montpelier farmers to Montpelier growers practice sustainable food production.

Mr. Moorman asked if that was intended to cover both the neighborhood gardens and the farmers. Ms. Pombar replied yes. In Strategy 1a Alan Goldman brought it to their attention the State of Vermont already does a good job in both the soil mapping and that we should review local soils and encourage the use of the best soils for local food production for farming. In Strategy 1b they are going to footnote conservation tillage. In Strategy 1d.1 they added something about encouraging local farm to school programs as well.

In Target 2 they changed regional to Montpelier. Food supply is grown and produced and they omitted consumed within Vermont. They may want to reconsider that as they reconsider the local debate about whether they want to do a radius or local. As changed it would read: "By 2025, 50 percent of the Montpelier food supply is grown and processed within Vermont in order to reduce dependence on vehicles."

Mr. Moorman said he would like to keep the consumed portion because grown and produced is only one aspect. It could then be shipped across the country, and if the whole target is to reduce dependence on imports of food. We are looking at it like a one-way street like imports coming in. We are just trying to tie in our local economy with our food supply. Mr. Moorman said they should go with the 100 mile radius.

Under Strategy 1a, how does that read now it has been changed?

Ms. Pombar said "Review state and local soil maps."

In Strategy 2a.2, they changed it to read "Support and promote local city farmer's market as a separate organization. In 2a.3 they brought in Washington County to Vermont. Mr. Goldman said they might want to make it a 100 mile radius to have it consistent.

Mr. Moorman asked if they wanted to change farmers to growers, or is there a purpose behind using farmers? Mr. Goldman and Ms. Pombar said it could be changed to growers.

Moving on to Strategy 2b they omitted 2b.2 and the first sentence in 2b.3. In 2b.4 they changed required to encourage.

Strategy 2d.1 they omitted the first line there and changed it to read: "Encourage community gardens through a local land-share program." Strategy 2d.2 they changed it to read "Examine and amend process regulations so they support local agriculture." In Strategy 2d.4, they added on shared land for agricultural purposes.

They added a Strategy 2e which reads "Build regional food networks that focus on balancing population density and acreage needed for food production."

Target 3, Strategy 3a, is changed to read: "Support the development of informal systems (omit every neighborhood) that allow residents to learn about, create and utilize existing infrastructure (gardens, root cellars, freezers, tool sheds, etc.) to grow, preserve, and/or share food."

Mr. Moorman said they are ready to discuss Goal E, Transportation.

Mr. DeSmet said the goal is:

Montpelier is built at a human scale with a transportation system that serves the access and mobility needs of all people through a choice of convenient, comfortable, affordable, and efficient transportation modes. The transportation system connects people and goods locally, regionally, and globally. Transportation needs are met safely in a manner supportive of human and ecosystem health.

There was a lot of conversation about the indicators and there need to be more concrete. Some of the group felt that a lot of people that participate in these methods of transportation have not been heard. The target is the indicator.

Mr. Moorman said they could make it a target without any strategies. Mr. Borgendale said it is a target that is facilitated by all of the other targets. Ms. Aloisi said they also changed it to 2040. Mr. Moorman said it goes with Target 1 in a second sentence. You want to increase the number of people who walk or bike and on the other hand you reduce the amount of private vehicle miles.

Mr. Borgendale said the other issue is that Target 2 probably facilitates the first item more than the commuting by walking or bicycling in terms of reducing total private vehicle miles in Montpelier.

Mr. Moorman said he sees why it is separate because all of Target 1 is about walking and biking.

Mr. DeSmet said they made a change on Strategy 1e to add the word secure after provide. They also added the year by 2015 for dates.

Mr. Moorman said he moved that the first bullet 73% read greater than 75%, 85% and 55%. The 2015 dates are ways to monitor the interim progress.

Mr. DeSmet said in Strategy 1g they wanted to identify areas that didn't have sidewalks. They were very specific and said extend sidewalks to Terrace, Berlin, Northfield, Barre Street, Elm Street, Towne Hill and Route 2. Mr. Borgendale said it was really extending sidewalks along major arteries and then a list.

Strategy 1h regarding introducing traffic calming tactics, i.e., Barre Street as needed. Ms. Aloisi said they crossed out near Main Street Middle School. Ms. Pombar said they should include Main Street Middle School as needed just because that is a huge concern for citizens. It still needs traffic calming because they are coming down the hill going too fast. She hears comments about this all of the time in her neighborhood.

Mr. Goldman said in Target 2 under the strategies he noticed there is nothing that really addresses encouraging new developments to have pedestrian and bike pathways and rewarding them for doing so.

Mr. DeSmet said that is in the housing section and it is currently in the zoning.

Mr. Moorman said Strategy 1j would be to encourage all new development to incorporate pedestrian and bicycle facilities.

Mr. Genge said in the housing it actually awards density bonuses to coordinate the two sentences makes sense.

Mr. Borgendale said what is really at issue here is how many people could conceivably be using public transit for the trip that isn't doing so. If the current number is that only 5 percent of the people who could take public transportation use it, then increasing the number of trips represented by 5 percent isn't going to be very significant. He thinks it needs to be a much more aggressive goal in that sense.

Mr. Moorman said he thinks they should leave it at 2015 because it is a priority that is going to be identified. He doesn't know about the increases by 15 percent. David's point is if you have a tiny ridership 15 percent is going to be like a person.

Council Member Sherman said as far as she knows they don't have very many local buses within Montpelier. It is hard to increase if we don't have any buses.

Mr. Borgendale said he could fix this by changing one word which is to change the word between increases and 15 percent from by to 2 so 15 percent of the community is riding public transit.

Mr. Moorman said maybe the additional indicators are in place and would be useful for us by 2015 to help us firm up the idea of how many of our residents actually use public transportation. Nancy's point is that local bus trips within Montpelier are not that many to begin with so naturally the current percentage is 3 percent. By 2015 we can monitor this and say if it is still around 3 percent that's the ridership that is going to be. The problem is we don't even know how many of our neighbors are using this service yet. The three bullets seem to be aimed more at figuring out who our population is that rides public transit.

Mr. Borgendale said the problem with public transportation is the quandary is that if you measure how many people are using public transportation you say there isn't sufficient market to support the infrastructure investment necessarily to do it. If you don't build the infrastructure it is so unavailable or inconvenient that people don't ride it. Inevitably, public transportation requires some kind of public investment and subsidy to get reach the threshold of infrastructure that makes it convenient for people to use it.

Ms. Pombar said she thinks that is spoken to in the strategies.

Mr. Borgendale said it is, but he doesn't think they can say five years down the road if we haven't made the investment that we can estimate what the market is by taking a survey of how many people are using the inadequate infrastructure because it is going to continue to be a small number.

Ms. Pombar said she had a comment on Strategy 1i related to the painted crosswalks. She would like to add to provide adequate lighting and signage to the crosswalks. She thinks that is a big problem with the city's crosswalks.

Mr. DeSmet said under Target 2, Strategy 2c there was concern about being too specific to GMTA. We want an intra-city system. They want to eliminate Strategy 2d relating to the trolley. Somewhere in Strategy 2e they want to add rail. Under 2f they wanted to talk about increased connectivity to intra-city options. They want to eliminate 2g.

Mr. Borgendale said the reason he suggested they get rid of 2h is that they incorporated a rail terminal facility into Strategy 2e. The second reason is that of all of the things they could do to encourage more passenger trains coming through Montpelier the least effective and one of the least significant obstacles is the Montpelier Junction Train Station. What you need to improve passenger rail is the rail facilities themselves. The issue in this community is building a public transportation infrastructure that is close to housing and not building housing close to an existing transportation system.

Target 3 – in Strategy 3c there was some conversation about moving that to Target 2. A Smart Jitney system is part of a public transportation infrastructure.

Mr. Goldman asked if under transportation there was anything about encouraging more parking and trying to get the state to work with the parking on Court Street. Mr. Borgendale replied no. Ms. Aloisi said there could be a whole other target about parking.

Mr. Moorman said he thinks they should note parking for a later discussion. Parking is under acknowledged in the transportation section. He has reread the goal statement again and feels it should be included in here to some extent. It needs its own target like they have one for pedestrians and bicycles and another one for public transportation and another for encouraging carpooling.

Target 4 – Ms. Aloisi said the only thing they had was talking about alternatives to salt because it talks about maintaining safety along walkways and roadways but linking it with the natural environment and becoming a saltless city while maintaining the safety.

Mr. Borgendale said they did think everything listed about floodplains and green infrastructure seemed to be not much to do with this section. They wanted to move it to the natural environment, which is a different chapter.

Mr. Moorman said they should do that. Move all of the bullets under the floodplain and green infrastructure to the natural environment.

Mr. Goldman asked if anyone wanted to talk about Barre and Main Street and the intersection problem with Sabin's Pasture coming down the road. Should that be a target?

Mr. Genge said it actually part of the capital plan. There is a design for it. There are existing plans out there that the Master Plan supports that direction and supports most of the goals that enable it.

Mr. Moorman said they are dealing with the enVision document and then also being asked to think about the Master Plan that is upcoming. He has been talking with the staff about centering on what the Master Plan will entail and what it will look like. He is inclined to think the traffic situation on Barre Street and the Sabin's Pasture development might be something more appropriate to address in the Master Plan rather than the enVision process. It is a far more immediate concern and issue. Let's try to revisit this thought at the next meeting.

We are done through this tonight. The next Planning Commission meeting will be February 8th.

Adjournment:

Upon motion by Mr. Borgendale and Mr. Bloch the Planning Commission adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Clancy DeSmet
Planning & Zoning Administrator